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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KUNR](#) [GM](#) [AF](#) [EU](#) [RS](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: THE SPD APPROVES OEF MANDATE, SIGNALS CONTINUED  
TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

REF: BERLIN 1977

HAMBURG 00000063 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Karen Johnson, Consul General, U.S. Consulate  
General Hamburg, U.S. Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Overall, foreign policy played a minor role at the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) October 26-28 national convention in Hamburg (reftel). It was, however, the main focus of a pre-convention event October 25 sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and geared mainly toward the diplomatic community. SPD Party Chairman Kurt Beck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier addressed foreign policy issues and used the FES event as an occasion to stress the SPD's credo of dialogue and disarmament over military action (a clear reference to Iran). They stressed the need to include Russia as a strategic partner, and the need to base German military deployments on UNSC mandates. They also highlighted the importance of the transatlantic relationship and the U.S. as a key partner. At the SPD convention itself, the debate on the issue of renewing the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) mandate was surprisingly short and delegates approved the proposal with an overwhelming majority. In his address at the convention, Steinmeier also announced that Germany will hold an international conference on Afghanistan next year. End Summary.

IRAN, RUSSIA, AND MISSILE DEFENSE

¶2. (C) Steinmeier's and Beck's FES speeches lauded the SPD as the "peace and disarmament" party, with a preference for dialogue and diplomacy over military action. Both, however, supported German and European readiness to assist in the world where needed, including with military deployments, but stressed the need for a clear UN mandate to support such actions. Steinmeier, whose speech was more structured than Beck's -- which tended to ramble -- listed six major areas of focus for German foreign policy: 1) addressing regional conflicts, including in Afghanistan and the Middle East, through dialogue, support of moderates, and civilian approaches; 2) increasing Europe's voice in the world, with an emphasis on multilateralism and working through the UN; 3) maintaining the transatlantic relationship as key; 4) addressing energy security and climate change; 5) promoting disarmament policy, stressing the preference for diplomatic means over military, including with regard to Iran; and 6) improving transnational cultural respect and communication.

¶3. (C) Steinmeier and Beck asserted that the German and EU approach to foreign policy combines economic progress and social

justice and focuses on resolving tensions through diplomacy. Both threw innuendos into their speeches regarding the U.S. stance toward Iran, with Steinmeier warning against "daily saber-rattling" and Beck criticizing those who consider military responses appropriate. While Iran and missile defense were seldom addressed during the convention, at the FES event Beck and Steinmeier stressed Germany's obligation to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons through diplomatic means together with the U.S., Russia, and China. Steinmeier reiterated this pledge in his speech at the convention, and the party's Hamburg Program clearly states that the SPD will continue to strive for progress on disarmament and non-proliferation. Steinmeier also reminded the SPD delegates that Russia and Turkey remain strategic partners for Germany within Europe and that Germany cannot allow Russia to turn away from Europe towards Asia. Steinmeier criticized Chancellor Merkel for not taking a stronger stand with the Russian government on human rights. (Comment: a slightly odd criticism, given Merkel's forthrightness on human rights in Russia -- especially in comparison to Gerhard Schroeder, Steinmeier's former boss. End Comment.) He remarked that if the stationing of a U.S. missile defense system in Europe led to misunderstandings with Russia, then it would not improve Europe's security.

#### STRENGTHENING THE EU AND UN

14. (SBU) At the party convention, Steinmeier also criticized the SPD's coalition partner and rival Christian Democratic Union (CDU) for pulling back from Germany's commitment to promote Turkey's EU membership. He called for Turkey to remain calm regarding Iraq. Several speakers throughout the weekend praised the achievements surrounding the EU reform treaty. Steinmeier also called for a strengthened UN. Beck reiterated that Germany is ready to take on more responsibility in the UN through a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Eventually, this seat should go to the EU, he stated. This principle is also laid out in the Hamburg Program.

#### OEF MANDATE SECURED FOR 2008 BUT CHALLENGES STILL AHEAD

HAMBURG 00000063 002.2 OF 002

15. (SBU) Steinmeier's convention speech introducing the debate on "Foreign-, Security-, and Development Policy" focused on the need for Germany to remain engaged in Afghanistan. The points he made were constructive and many were similar to arguments that USG representatives had made previously to SPD party members. He focused on the achievements made in Afghanistan since 2001 and the humanitarian challenges allies still face. He specifically stated that the number of German soldiers participating in ISAF was increasing, while the size of OEF was decreasing. He pointed out that most OEF soldiers are involved in training. Steinmeier announced that Germany plans to hold an international Afghanistan conference in 2008 in order to better coordinate reconstruction efforts. At the FES seminar on October 25 Steinmeier remarked that it had always been Germany's position that restoring security to Afghanistan requires both military and civilian means. He stated that Germany intends to further increase its efforts in the civilian realm and that he had promoted this view earlier that day in the Bundestag budget committee. After the convention debates, ConGen Hamburg Pol/Econ Officer and Embassy Berlin Pol Specialist discussed with Steinmeier the smooth passage of the OEF proposal and expressed appreciation for his strong words of support for the transatlantic relationship. Steinmeier referred to his September 19 Berlin speech outlining his ideas for renewing the relationship.

16. (SBU) At the convention, leading SPD Bundestag members including party board member and former "Young Socialist" chairman Niels Annen, Afghanistan Task Force leader Detlef Dzembitzki, and foreign policy spokesman Gert Weisskirchen spoke strongly in favor of continuing OEF participation. Annen also expressed some reservations about the operation, voicing a desire to see an explicit UN mandate for OEF, better communication among the allies, as well as more transparency.

Weisskirchen spoke on the need for ISAF and OEF to prevent further development of the drug trade in Afghanistan, particularly as a financial means for the Taliban. He also called for a "code of conduct" for OEF in order to minimize collateral damage. The strongest voice against OEF was future "Young Socialist" leader Francisca Drohsel, with whom Mission Germany will be following up to discuss Afghanistan in greater detail.

¶7. (SBU) SPD Bundestag members and party insiders assured ConGen Hamburg Pol/Econ Officer and Embassy Berlin Pol Specialist that with the convention approval, the OEF mandate should easily pass in the Bundestag in November. Although Steinmeier and Beck clearly stated that the SPD would require UN mandates for future military engagement, our contacts explained that the lack of a UN mandate should not significantly affect OEF passage in 2008. These SPD members said they view OEF and KFOR as an exception to this requirement. In discussions following the Afghanistan debate, Weisskirchen and Bundestag member Ursula Mogg remarked that OEF could still be a contentious issue in the fall of 2008 because at that time SPD Bundestag members will be in the process of securing spots on the SPD electoral lists for the 2009 elections. Both Mogg and Weisskirchen said that if the situation in Afghanistan improves or a UN mandate is passed, then OEF approval will not be an issue next year. However, if the situation worsens and kidnappings and killings continue, then SPD candidates may begin to come out against further OEF participation.

#### COMMENT

¶8. (C) The power struggle between Beck and Vice Chancellor and Labor Minister Franz Muentefering on unemployment benefits in the weeks leading up to the convention pushed OEF and other potentially controversial foreign policy issues to the background in Hamburg. Delegates were more concerned about domestic policy issues and did not focus on the details of OEF mandate renewal. Both in the convention speeches and the Hamburg Program, the SPD laid out specific foreign policy goals, but left room for maneuvering and finding workable solutions with allies. Despite some provocative remarks by Steinmeier and Beck on the margins for a largely diplomatic audience, the SPD convention did not signal any major shifts on foreign policy or transatlantic cooperation. End Comment.

¶9. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.  
JOHNSON